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18 December 1950

MEMORANDUM FOR

FROM: R. S. Cline

SUBJECT: Current Intelligence and Its Relation to Estimates.

By the term "current intelligence", which is used very loosely and ambiguously, I mean the continuous incoming flow of raw intelligence data or "spot" information. Good estimates must reflect a thorough knowledge, kept rigorously up-to-date, of the main patterns and trends in current intelligence.

It is possible, theoretically at least, for intelligence analysts to write good estimates on the basis of current intelligence supplied to them promptly and efficiently by other analysts not under their immediate administrative control. It is my understanding that the Office of National Estimates (ONE) proposes to follow this policy, choosing not to be responsible for reporting and giving "spot" evaluations of the incoming flow of current intelligence but rather merely to recast estimates when someone else has pointed out that current intelligence requires a re-estimate of the situation. This system seems to me to require three accompanying conditions: (1) the High Command must realize that ONE does not have responsibility for reporting current intelligence, even though the report may be so sensational that it requires instantaneous alerting of policy-makers and in effect requires a virtual re-estimate of the situation on the spot; (2) the analysts who are responsible for reporting current intelligence must be restrained insofar as possible from making their own re-estimates of the situation in the guise of "evaluation" attached to reports of current intelligence, since the re-estimate should properly be made by ONE in the light of its appreciation of all relevant factors; (3) responsibility for current intelligence reporting to ONE should be clearly established so that ONE can levy requests and establish standards for such reporting that will enable sound estimates to be written promptly whenever current intelligence requires it.

The fact that ONE issues a Daily Intelligence Summary seems to me to becloud the issue of ONE's responsibility for current intelligence reporting. ONE does not consider itself

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directly responsible for alerting the High Command about new items of information, and is not adequately staffed to perform such a service. Nevertheless, it seems to me a grave danger that the CIA and other responsible officials in Washington may almost unconsciously assume that they can look to ONE for all authoritative intelligence reports directly affecting national policy, because they know ONE writes National Intelligence Estimates and puts out a daily current intelligence report. I think very ostentatious efforts to disabuse the High Command of this notion should be made, perhaps extending so far as the transfer of the function of writing the Daily Summary to some other CIA component, if necessary.

The other alternative, of course, would be for ONE to develop a current intelligence staff geared to the task of reporting promptly spot information and current trends to policy-makers as well as to the writers of estimates. If the responsibility rests or is thought to rest on ONE for such current intelligence reporting, it is not enough simply to be prepared to write a new estimate when a new fact or trend makes itself apparent. It is essential to identify the fact or trend, properly evaluate it, and write brief analytical memoranda alerting policy-makers to the existence of the new fact or trend even while a re-estimate of the situation is getting in process. I think the function of current intelligence reporting thus conceived is one for which it is necessary to be definitely on the hook or definitely off, and that no doubts as to the position of ONE with respect to the hook should be allowed to linger in the minds of ONE's superiors.

*though says
ONE is
definitely
off the hook
by decision
of Deputy
Director Jackson
19 Dec 1950*

The course of action to take if ONE can be definitely relieved of the responsibility for current intelligence is fairly simple, and it is only important to take such steps before someone else's negligence in reporting is laid to ONE's door. If, willy-nilly, ONE is required to assume responsibility for current intelligence reporting, I think it is imperative that the function of current reporting be separated administratively from the function of providing "intelligence support" for the Estimates Staff and the Board of Estimates. In these circumstances, I think that the group now called the Intelligence Support Staff and the group now called the Estimates Staff should be combined and organized to serve the Board of Estimates and in addition to provide a group of experts to whom the current intelligence reporting staff could turn for evaluation of critical items of spot information.

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If by any chance ONE does get into the current intelligence reporting business, I should like the opportunity to make more concrete recommendations along the lines suggested in the previous paragraph. The purpose of this memorandum is mainly to call to your attention the ambiguities of ONE's present position with respect to current intelligence reporting.

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